



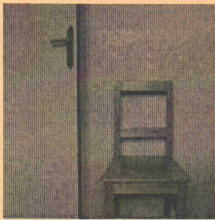
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Getting Research Permission

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By Laura Seay, Morehouse College



Getting formal and informal permission to conduct research in Africa is a challenging process, and the steps academics must take to do so vary widely from country-to-country. The Fulbright Program offers country-by-country guidance on research clearance requirements (eg, for [Namibia](#), [Kenya](#), and [Cameroon](#)), but the reality on the ground can be quite different, especially for scholars working in challenging contexts such as conflict or extreme state fragility. Additionally, sometimes it is necessary to get research clearance through informal channels at the district or village level in order to ensure access to subjects. To get a sense of how the process of getting permission to conduct research, ASA News asked several Africanist scholars about their experiences. Most responses to this survey came from scholars working in central and southern Africa. We welcome your comments and submissions about experiences in other parts of the continent.

While this is a non-scientific study, we hope it will help young scholars who are beginning to conduct research in Africa to be prepared for this key process. To maintain confidentiality, scholars are only identified by the country in which they have conducted field research.

Question 1: Briefly describe the process of getting formal clearance or permission in the country in which you conduct(ed) fieldwork.

Tanzania: I began by submitting an application through COSTECH which included a CV, research plan and other paperwork. Application forms are available online at: <http://www.costech.or.tz/services/research-clearance> – After submitting, there was the usual delay, but I sped up the process significantly by going to Dar es Salaam and walking the paperwork through myself. At this point, I met with COSTECH staff and the research clearance was given very quickly.

Zambia: For more information see www.network4zambia.com or email admin@network4zambia.com. The proper clearance process to research in Zambia takes place at two levels. In order to legally research you must be in Zambia on a “Visitor’s Permit,” which you can obtain after arriving. However, in order to have a visiting permit for a researcher you must be affiliated with a local institution. For most people, this means the University of Zambia (UNZA). A letter from UNZA requires a number of documents, including: * A research proposal – four sides A4 – outlining your topic, aims, methodology etc. * A sample of your work relating to Zambia – under 8000 words. Don’t worry too much for this. They seemed to barely read mine. * Two character references from lecturers in your department * A letter or form from your university confirming your enrollment * A copy of your criminal record (many people forget this, if you don’t have time to get it before you leave there should be ways around it) * A CV You will need a bank certified check and a government medical, both of which can be done in Zambia. Some researchers are required to go through a local “IRB” process, for which you must pay extra, but others are not required to and simply receive their permits. Once you have the letter, you can apply at the second level, Zambian Immigration, for your visitor’s permit. They are usually issued for six months or less.

Rwanda: Rwanda requires researchers in order to obtain a research permit through the Ministry of Education, located on the 5th floor of the MOE building in Kacyiru. The process is overseen by Dr. Marie-Christine Gasingirwa. In order to apply, one needs to present a letter to Dr. Gasingirwa or Minister of Education Dr. Vincent Biruta requesting the permit and briefly describing one’s research. Also, a CV, letter from one’s home university, letter of affiliation from the Rwandan agency one is working with (mine was from the Vice-Rector of Academic Affairs at the National University of Rwanda, who is quite helpful), two passport photos, and a research proposal and approval from the Rwandan National Ethics Committee (RNEC), located in the Ministry of Health building in Kicukiro. These last two are very tricky. The research proposal needs to be carefully worded, and around 4 pages, including sources. Mine was very close to non-academic sounding, as one will want to make one’s project sound as politically innocuous as possible, at the same time making it sound as though this project will bolster the RPF’s mission of stability and development. The RNEC is a whole different ballgame. One needs to present all the above research materials, plus a letter to the

Chairman Dr. Justin Wane, to the RNEC secretary, Valentine Ingabire. She is the most important person in the country if you are doing research. One also needs to supply the above materials on 9 separate CDs for the committee members. Each CD should be labeled with the applicant's name and the date of submission, and each should be in its own jewel case (don't mess around with this). Valentine must receive these 15 days before the monthly meeting of the RNEC in order to get a review; if not, you have to wait until the next month. Also, the review costs 100,000 RWF (approximately \$162), payable to Valentine. Once the RNEC approval is in place, the research permit is pretty much guaranteed. There is a separate process for people doing more invasive types of research, and as I understand, that goes through the Ministry of Health and costs about 450,000 RWF (approximately \$1500).

Zimbabwe (nb, based on research conducted 2000-2005, procedures may have changed): One must get an academic affiliation. After that, one must put together an application that includes a 2-3 page description of the project, which is then submitted to the Research Council. The research council must approve the application, after which it is submitted to the President's Office for a second vetting. Then it needs to go to Immigration, so they can issue you with a resident's permit. The whole process may take 6 months.

Malawi: I only know of processes for health research in Malawi. There is a long, back-and-forth process with the National Health Science Research Committee that is somewhat similar to an American IRB... But with added costs associated with printing 14 copies of everything: application then amended application with new documents requested by the review committee.

Question 2: Is it necessary to get official permission from both national and sub-national authorities in order to conduct research in this country?

Tanzania: You need to have an affiliate or organization you will be working with – so not sub-national authorities, but some in-country representative or agency affiliation is necessary.

South Africa: It doesn't appear so. No one (at the archives, etc.) ever asks for proof of such permission.

Zambia: Yes, from Zambian Immigration as well as the institute of affiliation (usually UNZA).

Rwanda: No, as everything is quite centralized.

Zimbabwe: Officially, I don't believe so, but, unofficially, definitely. Especially in rural areas, informants are much more willing to speak with you if you have met with or are carrying a letter from the district commissioner, from a provincial official, or from a ministry (in addition to the academic affiliation letter). Even then, if you're working in communal areas, etc, you will likely need to get an introduction from the headman or chief.

Malawi: Not de jure, de facto. If you don't have official stamps from the district commissioner's office, it is a challenge to get traditional authorities to allow you to work in their areas.

Question 3: What fees were associated with getting official permission to conduct research in the country?

Tanzania: \$50 deposit submitted with application and then \$300 when your proposal is approved. Some affiliations in country have additional fees.

South Africa: According to the official list (<http://www.southafrica-newyork.net/homeaffairs/research.htm>), you need to pay 1) **Non-refundable fee of \$72.00 money order** for processing 2) **\$16.00 money order** for overnight mailing 3) **\$1,500.00 money order** for repatriation deposit to be lodged in case applicant stays for longer than one year or travels on one way ticket

Zambia: The fees are about \$200 for immigration. The fees for UNZA are \$100 per month of research affiliation.

Rwanda: The RNEC review is 100,000 RWF, which is mandatory for all researchers working with human subjects (even if, like mine, said subjects are historical/no longer alive).

Zimbabwe: I don't remember. It was maybe US\$100 — but I think I paid part of it in Zim dollars, so that might be \$500 or more now.

Malawi: I can't remember. The official fee for affiliation with the university and the national archives access is \$500, each.

Question 4: Is it necessary to get permission/clearance in person, or can it be handled by phone or online?

Tanzania: It theoretically can be handled online (or at least through the mail services) but in my experience, it was easier to just plan on spending a few days in Dar to get everything in order before beginning my research. I think it does help to submit the application early, and then if its not going fast enough, it might speed things up to do it in person. If you have time, everything can be handled by mail, phone or online.

South Africa: Not sure. Perhaps if you apply overseas, you can do it by post, but otherwise I think it's handled in person.

Zambia: It is definitely necessary in person and will require several weeks of your time before it is complete. If you are doing archival research, however, a letter from a professor at UNZA can get you into the National Archives to begin your research when you are not running back and forth from UNZA, Immigration, and other relevant bodies.

Rwanda: Ostensibly, the Ministry of Education Directorate of Research has an online platform for submitting materials, but it was up and running

at any point during my process. I have found that, as with most things in Rwanda, it's better to just show up at 7:30am and talk to authorities in person.

Zimbabwe: In person.

Malawi: You might not have to be there in person, but it helps to have someone walk it in. Since hard copy filing is required, you need someone to assist you.

Question 5: On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very simple and 10 being very difficult, how easy or difficult was it to get permission to conduct research in the country?

Tanzania: About an 8 when I was managing it from Nairobi, and a 1 once I got to Dar and met with COSTECH officials in person.

Zambia: 6 (This might be a bit low for some people, but I have researched in communist countries and I am used to Africa. For people used to the USA or UK and with little or no African experience, it could easily be a 9 or a 10. It is not impossible, it just takes time.)

Rwanda: It's about an 8.5.

Zimbabwe: 10

Malawi: 9

Question 6: Do you perceive it to be more difficult to get permission to conduct research on politically or socially sensitive topics than for other topics? Are you aware of scholars who have been denied clearance to conduct research in this country and/or of the reasons why he/she was denied permission?

Tanzania: I did my research on gender and HIV/AIDS, which is a sensitive topic. I did not have any problems, however, I did tone down the feminist language for the proposal.

South Africa: Not aware of any scholars being denied at all for research. I don't think there's any issue regarding political or social sensitivity and the granting of research permission in South Africa.

Zambia: No, I am not aware of this ever happening. Zambia is very open and you would even be hard pressed to find any documents labeled "classified" in the National Archives and there are none to my knowledge in the UNIP or Catholic Mission Archives (the three main repositories for research). If you can prove your affiliations and funding, and you have a bit of patience in the process of obtaining permission, you will be fine.

Rwanda: It is my feeling that the Rwandan government is actively trying to discourage foreign researchers from doing research in the country. Many of my other friends have also had very arduous processes of gaining approval. I haven't heard of anyone yet who has been denied, but that may also be because some people just get fed up and quit. For projects that are considered politically sensitive (like mine), I feel like there is extra scrutiny.

Zimbabwe: Yes. Yes. I have also known people who have been stripped of their clearance and declared persona non grata. This last person was working on farmworkers. Any work related to politics or to the land reform process is suspect and probably very difficult to pursue. Though my research was political, I was affiliated with the Department of Economic History, and I received research clearance to study post-colonial labor history. Again, this is again a function of the time that I was doing fieldwork, but I would advise anyone thinking about research clearance in Zim to be similarly cautious. Framing is crucial.

Malawi: I don't know of anyone who applied through the NHRSC in Malawi that was proposing sensitive work.



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